

Mary

She keeps her long red hair in a high and tight ponytail, but even then it reaches all the way to the small of her back. In class, she always sit in the front with perfect posture, the appearance of a well-groomed, well-read, engaged student, but her mind is always elsewhere. She'll draw little doodles in the margins of her college-ruled notebook, these all-black shapes and caricatures tuned with a deft hand, that look of sloppy refinement. Sometimes she'll remember song lyrics as best as she can and the half-accurate lines appear like stream-of-consciousness mantras. She places these in the margins as well.

Mary and I met one time in our dorm at the beginning of the semester. She was introduced to me by a friend and we shook hands and made that awkward attempt at being, if not "friends," then at least friendly to each other in passing. Sometimes it works, most often it does not; more often, the attempt to befriend someone you don't know at all, just as a channel of possible-friendship through another person, ends before it can really begin. Then you spend the rest of your time remembering if they even remember you. "Did you know that we met?" "Do you remember my name?" "Do you still want to be friends, or friendly, or was that just a social contract we signed?" If every choice we make (or implicit in the choices we don't make, *that* choice we make) creates its own universe and reality, then somewhere you and Mary are the best of friends after being introduced. Maybe you're close friends. Maybe you're dating her. Maybe you're just casual acquaintances, which is at least more than what happens now.

She doesn't eat much. She'll grab a bowl of cereal or a bowl of fruit. She seems like she would drink. Her gait is unmistakable; across campus that awkward diagonal stride is her calling card, as if she moves her hips in that way on purpose, maximizing the swing of her butt as it sways back and forth. She once smoked a cigarette by the garden late at night, staring absently at the plots, ashing carelessly, her body's weight shifted to the left, her right arm limply supporting a Camel.

Mary has a habit of nearly-winking when she speaks, as if she's unsure of what she's saying, the words eking out of her eyes, or failing even that, her mouth.

"What was your name?"

Then I told her.

"Mary, Mary, quite contrary..." as if the joke had long run its course and she was firing a pre-emptive strike.

Her hands were soft, almost weightless.

I don't think she remembers me now every time we cross paths.